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IN DEFENSE OF SOCRATES' JUDGES

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REVOLUTION SACRED AND PROFANE

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IN DEFENSE OF SOCRATES' JUDGES

Philosophers, rather glibly, have assumed it as a matter of course that in the most famous court-trial of the pre-Christian era, the trial which took place in the City of Athens in 399 B.C., they have been (and still are) on the side of Socrates, the convicted criminal, rather than on the side of his triumphant judges. It does not seem to me that this assumption is justified by the facts. Instead, the actual attitude and conduct of philosophers in most ages appears to me to arraign them on the side of Socrates' judges rather than on that of Socrates himself. This, at any rate, appears to be true of too many philosophers in the present tragic hour in human history.

Instead of rising above the noisy clash of clans and above the battlecries of the moment, instead of undertaking the leadership of humanity in matters of the intellect and of spirit, philosophers once again, as so many times before, are busily engaged in joining the mad chorus of international strife and in adding vehemence to its sound and fury, ready to climb on the band-wagons of stop-gap saviours. For the most part, we are much too busy oiling the machinery of military national defense and keeping it moving to the tune of untold billions and in behalf of the systematic planning of human destruction to be able either for ourselves to see things, with Spinoza, "*sub specie aeternitatis*," or to be fit to provide this sadly needful humanity with the kind of critical thought and intellectual leadership, without which not merely the present but even the future of humanity must be largely hopeless.

At the moment I am not concerned with the detailed arguments as between Socrates and his judges. Rather, I am concerned with the basic fact that Socrates, Athens' wisest man, was on trial for his life on the double charge of being a blasphemer of the gods, on the one hand, and a corrupter of youth, on the other; and with the other equally fundamental fact that the judges of Athens, who tried, convicted, and condemned him, represented the social judgment and conscience of the population of Athens in 399 B.C. Socrates, practicing the real and intended role of the *philos sophiae*, had made the fatal mistake of daring to follow the voice of critical reflection and wisdom rather than the voice of the *demos*. So far from considering it his function simply to mirror and reflect the sentiments and fluctuating emotions of the fickle populace—day before yesterday saying: "We were fooled by idealistic slogans into mass-murder once, but never again," yesterday committed to all possible aid "short

of war," and today whooping it up with all the former gusto and enthusiasm for making the world once more "safe for democracy" by supporting the international mass-murder the second time in one generation—Socrates had the temerity to *think* and to express his thoughts freely: a dangerous thing to do in any age; but never so dangerous as when feelings run high and the populace is off on a rampage, whipped up to fever-heat and fury by demagogues with unholy axes to grind. There never was a better time in our whole national life than the present to remind ourselves of the fact that the wisest man of Athens stood condemned by Athens' best legal minds as a dangerous disturber of Athens' peace, as a rebel and revolutionary, as the "fifth columnist" of his day. No wonder they were determined to stop him! No wonder either that they succeeded. For, the "fifth column," never more dangerous to the state than in times of emergency and of national crisis, must be stopped at any price. Socrates, because he refused to prostitute his thought and speech until it would merely have become the *ancilla populi*, had to pay with his life for his devotion to the unpopular truth and for his insistence upon freely speaking his mind in criticism of the mob's emotions, thoughts, and actions.

The events of 399 B.C., however, are, unfortunately, not unique in human—or, for that matter, even in philosophical—history. The same sort of thing happened in Jerusalem early in the first century (of our own time-recording) and in Holland sixteen centuries later, simply to extract two of the most famous repetitions of such tendencies and procedures. No age seems to delight in the presence, within its midst, of a gadfly, a mind which refuses to succumb to the mere mouthings of the shibboleths of the period, but insists rather upon stabbing bluntly and ruthlessly into some of the most cherished of the era's fairy-tales. The year of crisis, 1944, in this regard differs not one whit from other ages or periods. Just because it undeniably is a year of crisis, it shares with other such critical periods of human history the flare for high-sounding slogans and for what look like very idealistic convictions and commitments. And anyone who does not immediately fall for these slogans or fails to swallow them, hook, line, and sinker, is at once being made to look very devilish indeed. Appeaser, "fifth columnist," traitor! These are the words heard on every side, if one even so much as ventures to question the popular hysteria, the increasing lust for blood, the whole mad rush over the edge of the abyss of total war and mass-murder. Not to be critical has come to be the order of the day, and that even within philosophical circles. Or, if one *must* be critical, then let's be critical of nice neat little questions of epistemology, of metaphysics, of symbolic logic, or of the methodology of science. But, in heaven's name, let's

not be critical of the mob-mind and fury, of national hysteria, of patriotic slogans or nationalistic catchwords,—in short, of the state or of the direction in which the state is moving. Whatever else we be, let's be "good patriots"! Let no one dare to question our patriotism! And, to be patriotic, in these days, has come to be equivalent to accepting uncritically and without question whatever the Great White Father in Washington has, in his divine wisdom, chosen to do.

In other words, the inherent rightness and justice of the decisions of the state must not be questioned. The state is sacrosanct: above the criticism of thinkers and philosophers. And/or *vox populi, vox dei*.

These are, of course, not new doctrines or new procedures. They are, if not as old as the hills, at least as old as Socrates and older. Moreover, they have, more recently, received a quite unusual amount of—even philosophical—attention. For example, for more than a century now, philosophers and political scientists alike have been in the habit of chastising Hegel for his apotheosis of the Prussian State. It has been common practice to denounce Hegel for his easy sell-out to the Prussian powers-that-were. And, still more recently, we have heard it said on almost innumerable occasions that no self-respecting philosopher could live under a modern communistic, fascistic, or nazi regime and prostitute his mind and his profession by becoming an academic protagonist of the procedures, propaganda, commitments, and directions of the political state under which he happened to be living. Let it be said here in unequivocal fashion that the present writer has found himself in complete agreement with both of these judgments all along.

But, having made this confession, the writer never dreamed he would live to see the day when multitudes of his colleagues would turn around and adopt for themselves and for their own program of teaching the same uncritical attitude of mind which they had been in the habit of criticizing so severely in Hegel and in Fascist and Communist philosophers. Who could have dreamed, even three or four years ago, that the critical minds of American philosophers would shortly be converted into mere apologists either for their own (American) State or for that of the British Empire? Who, at that time, would have been believed, had he foretold that American and British philosophers would—within so short a space of time—put their own (supposedly philosophical) services just as unequivocally into the service of their own respective existing political states as Hegel had done a hundred-and-twenty years ago and as German, Italian, and Russian philosophers have been doing for the past decade? And who, above all, would have believed that such a complete reversal of attitude and procedure would be possible on the part of thinkers whose basic and life-long commitment and training

had more particularly qualified them for maintaining a critical attitude of mind even in the midst of national spleens of emotionalism and hysteria, and for the kind of aloofness from the mere immediacy of a situation which, first and foremost, is supposed to characterize the truly scholarly mind?

Fairness to facts demands the admission from us, therefore, that—once again, as, in the days of Hegel and of Heidegger and Gentile—philosophy is failing us at precisely the point where the only justification for philosophy, in the long run, can be found: in its ability, namely, to remain above the noise and cry of the mob-mind, critical and unperturbed, able to see, to judge, to lead,—rather than to accept, agree, and follow.

This failure of philosophy in periods of crisis is to be noted along at least five distinct lines.

1. In the first place, it is the failure to be able to maintain the reflective and critical attitude of mind in the presence of great waves of popular emotionalism. In the light of what has already been stated above, and in the light, moreover, of what only too obviously goes on all about us, morning, noon, and night, it is perhaps, hardly necessary to establish this point by means of elaborate demonstrations. The facts and attitudes all about us veritably shout the truth of this assertion into our ears.

Nor should it be necessary to argue at length that such an attitude and procedure on the part of philosophers amounts to an abdication of reason in favor of hyper-nationalistic spleens of so-called patriotism. I am not asking that the philosopher should be unpatriotic or even that he should be free from—even the emotional—attitude of deep regard and love for his country. It is possible to be possessed of all of that and still maintain a reflectively critical attitude of mind and procedure. Since when does it follow that, because a parent may find it necessary to be critical of the conduct of his child or even to chastise that child, he therefore does not love the child? And since when is *intelligent* patriotism the equivalent of unquestioning acceptance of whatever the powers-that-be in the state decide to do? I had always thought that such attitude was that, not of a free, but of a slave-mind, worthy, perhaps, of fascist and communist enslavement, but not of free, democratically committed minds. Have I been wrong in these assumptions?

2. This failure of philosophy in our present period of crisis is, in the second place, a failure to understand the causal relationship between means and ends. This is a very sad confusion, indeed. For one would imagine that men who, since the days of Hume, have spent as much time on the problem of causality as have philosophers, would not so easily be taken in at this point. The grandson of one

of Britain's most famous nineteenth century philosophers, namely Aldous Huxley, recently thought it of the utmost importance to call the intelligent world's attention to this sad—universal—confusion between means and ends. But, it will now have to be admitted, Huxley's cry was that of "a voice crying in the wilderness." No one has paid any serious attention to his protests or to his warnings. For, no one—under the emotional stress of the present international crisis—is willing either to admit or even to consider the so perfectly obvious fact that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he who soweth to the flesh shall, from the flesh, reap corruption; and he who soweth to the spirit shall, from the spirit, reap life everlasting." If I may be permitted to translate: he who sows the instruments of destruction, shall reap what he has sown, namely destruction; whereas he who has the courage to sow the spiritual and moral qualities of justice, peace, and good-will, shall also reap what he has sown, namely the creative fruits of such moral and spiritual endeavors and activity. There is no "hokus-pokus" in this, it is merely the inevitable operation of a universe which is orderly rather than capricious, in which causality—even though this principle remain yet unexplained in detail—is a real, experimental, and testable fact. In this kind of world it is simply the height of folly to imagine that any nation can make the "all-out" effort for the systematic development of hatred and destruction which modern "total war" requires and then expect to reap the fruits of peace, prosperity and good-will. It would seem that one would not have to be a philosopher (or a scientist either, for that matter) to recognize this fact.

The whole doctrine of "internal relations,"—that fond baby of philosophical idealism, but which has furnished plenty of fuel for philosophical discussions way beyond the boundaries of the idealistic schools—offers further evidence for the direct, immediate, and inherent relationship between means and ends. The proposition: "he who takes the sword shall perish by the sword" is not true because it was uttered by the Nazarene, but rather it was uttered by the Nazarene because he found it to be true; and all human history bears witness to the fact. This is that kind of a world, a world of relationships, a world of order, a world of cause and effect. Who should know this better than philosophers? Who has meditated upon such relationships longer and more carefully than have philosophers? Is it not strange that now we are suddenly asked, by many of these same philosophers, to forget all this work and all the conclusions derived from that work? Or is it merely that—when it is academically more convenient and emotionally more satisfying—we can just blissfully overlook our conclusions derived from the careful and painstaking work of our more coldly rational and theoretical

moments? I shall leave the answer to these questions to those who will find it difficult to give answers which will be at one and the same time satisfying to their emotional needs and to the requirements of truth and validity in an at least related and orderly universe.

3. The third failure of philosophy in the present crisis is a moral failure. It implies the basic surrender of faith in a moral universe, or at least in a moral human universe (for I have no intention at the moment of making the moral category a metaphysical one). The assertion (and active procedure) that evil can be overcome only by the use of more—of the same kind of—evil, though admittedly a thoroughly popular notion, obviously constitutes a fundamental betrayal of the effectiveness of moral categories. How long and how vociferously have we all denied the claim that “might makes right!” But when, in a pinch, in a crisis, it comes to action and conduct, we not only still continue to base our action on the principle, but we go out to defend our action based on such an obviously immoral principle by devious theoretical detours. Not only mankind in general, but even philosophers and moralists themselves have, apparently given up any faith they may ever have had in the effectiveness of goodness in its own right. In the light of such surrender, one cannot but wonder what teachers of courses in ethics will have to teach from now on. But, perhaps the answer to this last question is not so far to seek. For, if I remember correctly, a theological moralist (so-called) tried to find his way out of this difficulty as much as twelve years ago, when he developed a theory of morality for individual man, but claimed that on the broader social level men could not help but act immorally. 1. What such a notion will ultimately do even to so-called private morality needs not much guessing. The author of that claim has, of course, long since thrown himself into the arms of an all-powerful God, in Whom, I suppose, all these contradictions inherent in man find their blissful (though from a merely human standpoint I suppose useless) solution. But this seems to me to be an attempt to save the moral consciousness at a point where it loses every specific human meaning. If this is all that can be said for social morality, the sooner we shall give up the whole concept of morals the better off we shall be; for we shall then at least be honest with ourselves.

Yet, in the light of such a far-reaching surrender of faith in the inherent effectiveness of goodness and truth, especially on the part of the philosophers and moralists themselves, is it really any wonder that we have had to live to see our so-called civilized modern world

1. I refer, obviously, to Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1932).

topple all about us in ruins? What else was to be expected in a world in which even some of the foremost advocates of morality and decency had themselves lost faith in their efficacy? It has taken men like Walter Lippmann, Aldous Huxley, and Lewis Mumford to remind us of the devastating nature of that kind of a loss of faith. And, of course, since those men do not wear the togas of the professional philosophers, we would not think of stopping to listen to their voices. All the worse for us. It isn't Nero merely who, in our day, is "fiddling while Rome is burning," it is we philosophers who are increasingly guilty of that crime. Guilty of it, because we have surrendered one of the greatest privileges and opportunities of our profession: that of being the moral leaders of the age.

4. There is still a fourth failure with which philosophy is to be charged in the present hour of crisis. This failure is due to the blemish of near-sightedness. This too is a strange charge to have to bring against philosophers. For it is the philosopher, after all, who has been claiming to "see life steadily and see it whole." It is the philosopher who is supposed to look at life and the universe *sub specie aeternitatis*, or, if not from the vantage-point of eternity—a point which may, after all, be even beyond the philosopher—, then at least from the long range point of view. It is the philosopher who is expected to be able to rise above the merely specious present, above the merely "here and now," above the clatter and clanging of the momentary noises, above the sound and fury of today's immediacy and its persistently noisy but nonetheless swiftly passing claims. I say, the philosopher is "expected to." But such expectations do not seem to trouble us very seriously. When everyone else howls, we claim the right and privilege of howling with the mob. That by so doing we have forfeited every rightful claim to leadership does not seem to trouble us very greatly.

5. And with this I have already touched upon the fifth and last failure of philosophy in the present crisis: the surrender of our intellectual leadership. In at least a practical way, this is perhaps the most serious charge of all. For, it inevitably confronts us with the question: where is humanity to look for leadership at precisely the time when it stands most seriously in need of intellectual and moral leadership, namely in a time of crisis, if, whenever a real human crisis appears, the philosophers, along with the rest of the population, start at once to run away from the facts and certainly from the light, and begin to seek refuge in Plato's ancient "Cave" or else in the equally as cave-like "black-outs" of modern civilization and culture? If philosophers can just as easily and as quickly be swept off their intellectual, moral, and spiritual feet as are the more untutored mortals, if together with the mob we readily succumb to the

loud trumpetings of the moment and the noisy propaganda of the yellow press,—if, at almost a moment's notice, we seem to be capable of losing all sense of balance, of perspective, of wholeness, of critical acumen, of intellectual detachment, and of moral understanding, where is humanity going to look for, much less find, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual leadership for which no time cries out so loudly as does a time of crisis? Moreover, if the world's intellectual leadership, once again, is ready to sell out to the political state (on both sides of the conflict, as we all know it did during the first world war), where is a trustworthy leadership—a leadership which would guide humanity into the new day and the new world which must be created—going to come from? Who is going to provide it? And if we cannot do so, if we must stand condemned ourselves by our own conduct in this hour of crisis, what help can we bring to those in our civilization who, because they belong to the next generation, are rightfully looking to us for leadership, for courage, for moral faith and spiritual commitment—whereas we have nothing to give them but the husks of yesterday's theories which we have let the outburst of human barbarism and savagery in Europe and Asia rob us of, because we never really did believe in their kernel and core in the first place?

I can find only one immediate answer to all these questions, and that is the frank admission that once again Socrates stands condemned: this time by the practices of his own profession. If we are really still even partially honest we ought frankly and openly to exonerate Socrates' judges from any guilt; we ought freely to come out in their defense. For, did they not save Athens' youth from "corruption" and Athens' state from radical rebellion? Did they not save the *status quo* of ancient Athens? Long live the judges of Socrates!

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REVOLUTION SACRED AND PROFANE

We laboriously explore our difficulties to discover: what seemed new ways are soon distilled to the old, and we are to be rudely shouldered into channels long since laid down. The literary dream and the individual synthesis, freshly conceived and romantically inspired, may illumine the edges and enrich the interstices of social life—may even, at rare times, provide genesis and sustenance for a new regrouping of the whole. But for the most part, lumbering, structured society will not yield itself to the eager Promethean hand nor readily consent to be remolded in the name and in the image of each passing God. We may, if we like, conjure up our goals with an artist's hand; but that is the pattern of random proposal, of offering a varied platter to the real arbiters of history, heedless of the need to search out the possibilities in the given world as the foundation-stone of rational political enterprise.

The sign and warrant of political wisdom (and in its inversion, the brand-mark of naivete) is the recognition of the resistant, recalcitrant, limiting nature of human personality and social institutions. I am not, it is perhaps politic to add, entirely ignorant of the modern viewpoint in social psychology, with its brash plasticity-complex. But it seems to make sense to insist that while much in that approach is important, affording a quickened awareness and a more accurate notion of methodology and its postulates, nevertheless serious people will not confuse the latter with the hardy truths won in the course of human experience, however poorly they may be formulated. For *action*—that kind, at least, which intervenes in events, which deals significantly with the primary stuff of social change, with classes and parties and governments—is always shaped and molded by the character of the institutions which it ventures to manipulate. The politically effective form of this impingement is the *limitation of alternatives*, or, put another way, the *presentation of historical choices*. The projected history of any given period may be infinitely various in the realm of fancy, but the real paths along which events may run are few and none too far apart. The philosopher may, if he is brilliant, have a viewpoint pretty much his own, but the philosopher-in-action must soon choose sides or retire. He cannot enter politics on his own terms; he must make his peace with that force, in effective conflict, with whose fate he has bound himself and his ideals.

The historical choice is the choice which is offered. It is the choice which may and can be made because (1) large social forces are or can be readily mobilized in the direction desired; (2) solutions

are offered to the felt problems of key groups; (3) continuity, though not identity, with the traditions, ideals, and habit patterns of the common man is maintained and (4) the program and its instruments are *responsible*, in the sense of a full acceptance of consequences without dissolution, at critical periods, into one or another more vigorous trend. There are, at any time, only a few different movements which can satisfy these conditions. They represent, at that time; the given historical alternatives, which devour between them those who attempt to find a median path. These alternatives tend, in practice, to polarize around absolutes, so that those who value action as intervention must lay aside, in choosing within the context of action, undue affection for the neat formulation and special interpretation. That is why the artist is not a politician; and it is what we mean when we say that a movement has become mature, has reached its level, has found its natural allies. It is a sure corollary of this conception that fundamental social change is gradual, always effectively braked by the moderating forces which great human agencies bring with them as they search out the unknown in action.

It may seem strange to read these words, so replete with conservative connotations, in the pages of a socialist magazine. But closer reflection will teach us, I believe, that this is as it should be. For socialism today is more and more becoming the receptacle, protagonist and defender of the fundamental social ties as well as the highest ideals of our civilization. In the old days, socialists could lay their every stress on the changes, the overturns, which they wished to institute, leaving to the politically conservative factions the task of defending the principles, traditions, and institutions of social order. This division of function seemed fitting and proper. For it was natural to believe that those who defended a specific *status quo*, the existing political and economic order of things, should find it easy and useful to cling to the banner and extol the merits of the very principle of order and social stability itself. And so it was, for a long period. For although some branches of international socialism, nearing and reaching the heights of power, began to experience the difficulties which responsibility for the nation as a whole entails, most of the movement maintained its role of oppositional minority and social solvent.

But this timeless allocation of function, the conservative defender and radical innovator, has been robbed of its meaning by the complexity of the new relationships. No longer can we say that those who are defending particular structures shield as well the basic relations of mutual aid and fellowship which lie at the root of society. The value of the *status quo* as the crisis deepens and endures becomes,

for those in power, defined in the realistic, self-conscious terms of naked rule and privilege. Despairing as they must of the viability of the traditional social forms and procedures for the maintenance of their power, the conservative elements become institutionally radical. They seize upon any course, any movement which will carry them on its shoulders and promise relief to fear-ridden bank accounts. In this way they effectively and finally divorce their special interests from the general interest and welfare of the community at large. For the new instrumentalities to which they turn are reckless of consequences beyond the capture of power, and are therefore subversive of the moral bonds and accustomed forms of social order.

Hence are the roles reversed. Socialists find themselves defending large areas of American culture (the principles of constitutionalism, Christian fellowship, individual liberty in conscience and politics and economics—to only begin the list) at precisely the time when most other groups, who *support* those presently in power, are in unashamed flight from those principles. The socialist program, in means as well as in ends, is keyed to those precepts and therefore becomes, on an historical plane, the culturally conservative and defensive movement.

Not without difficulties, not smoothly or free of racking, enervating problems. The law of the limitation of alternatives is unrelenting. The choice we make within the bounds it sets is hardly academic, or even transient; to act upon such a choice is to define the structure, the operative ideals, the habits, the alliances, in a word, the *character* of our movement. The classic decision which each generation of socialists has had to make is that between reformist social democracy and apocalyptic bolshevism. These are the polar trends. Both have deep roots in man's nature, both can intervene effectively in events—each to its own part, each in its own way. The characters of these two movements, as we have come to know them after long acquaintance, seem to exhaust the field of significant choice which the complex interweaving and interdependence of historical structures will allow us. There is no middle course which will not soon be drawn into the vortex of one or the other of the historical alternatives.

It is true, of course, that neither movement has been able to attain its professed goals. That is why many socialists, anxious to learn new lessons, have sought to delineate a new road which would be neither reformist nor bolshevist. Yet, while that research is commendable, insofar as it sharpens our understanding of tactics and strategy, it is unwise to hide our faces from the fact that ultimately we must take sides in the real struggle, which will deal harshly with our special programmatic qualifications. What, in action, will be the basic character of our movement? Will it be attuned to an es-

entially gradualist philosophy, with conservative precepts, with a due respect for those institutions already formed which protect and nourish our values and ideals? Or shall we build an altogether different movement, sustaining and ruled by radically different personalities, which will reach down into the emotional depths of society for the instruments of its nihilistic venture? Intelligence must make this choice self-consciously, for it sets the framework of all action. It is only in the light of the basic road we have chosen that a discussion of new procedures and wiser strategy can make sense.

Socialists who have come to know the spiritual roots of what they stand for will recognize immediately their affinity with the gradualist course. For while European socialism went down to defeat stumbling over its own errors and poor leadership, these movements still remained basically socialist and progressive. And since they were not the sole arbiters of history, it may be questioned whether even the wisest strategy would have led to victory. Bolshevism, on the other hand, transformed itself into an utterly alien instrument, turning toward quite different sources of strength and power, and embodying in explicit form all the merely potential culturally nihilistic elements in oppositional socialism. The social-democratic road leans on those cultural roots which we seek to defend; bolshevism is avowedly contemptuous of them. Social-democracy accepts (with due allowance for human frailty) the basic Christian-democratic values; bolshevism divorces itself from them and from any sense of proper humility which they entail.

Sacred Goals, Profane Tools

The bolshevik revolution is in its nature *sacred*, generating an emotional emphasis which turns its adherents inward upon the apocalyptic image. This is hardly strange, for where objectives are vague and ill-defined, where the power of a given party (read: its leadership) is confused with the requirements of history, then the road to power absorbs the entire political agenda. The revolutionary upheaval and its preparation become the receptacle of all political wisdom—suffused with the discharged tensions of those who have committed themselves beyond recall to a simple, unforked road to social salvation. It is only fair to say that reformism too, like any other special method, has sought a halo of its own. But here the consequences, though sufficiently disturbing, have been relieved by the concentration upon tangible achievements in the here and now, always a reliable solvent of any vulgar mythology of redemption.

The tools of social and political action, devised with an eye toward what the world is really like, must be *profane* in character. As method, they must be secular, and therefore vulnerable to fact and

logic, before the requirements of pragmatic evaluation and democratic dispute can come into effective play. The revolutionary elements in gradualist socialism must be profane and secular rather than sacred and religious, for they will be circumscribed by the established character of the movement as a whole and limited to the achievement of specific, clearly-defined objectives. It should be emphasized that it is not *all action*, but the *tools* of action which must be profane. Within the general context of our movement, the revolutionary elements are tools, and in that sense subsidiary, at a second remove, from the primary, character-defining motifs. Indeed, it is just in terms of *what* is considered sacred that the most useful distinctions between movements are made. The fact that there are sacred elements in bolshevism is not, of itself, to be deprecated; it is what they hold sacred—the power-mechanisms of revolutionary action, the hypostatization of what can be only a tool of significant but limited usefulness—that marks them as alien. It is well to recall that revolution is more (and less) than the sheer annihilation of traditional values. Before the subversion of accepted human relationships is the plain, practical, limited goal of transferring social and political power from the hands of those who rule the commanding heights of our economy. *The achievement of the latter by revolutionary means is dictated by the empirical context of our problem*; to employ those means with sagacity and care requires an impersonal budget of consequences, an accounting which happily is strengthened by prior knowledge of the inherent dangers of our ambivalent tools.

The gradualist emphasis is revelant primarily to *institutional* change; it deprecates the uprooting of established forms where subtle transformations are practicable, ever conscious of the limited capacity of men and structures for the absorption of the thoroughgoing and all-pervasive. The bolsheviks do not escape these strictures, for in expunging the presently traditional they are far from casting men into new molds. The most they can achieve is a return to older forms, still founded on the enduring character of the human materials with which they must deal. The gradualist cannot make his peace with the bolshevik revolution, for that cuts at the moral groundwork of his society. But he will realize the necessity for a more limited revolt, profound in its ultimate consequences but concentrated against only a relatively small sector of society as we know it. He will, in the course of this action, be ready to defend those gains, received and won, which fashion a restrained, reflective and moral culture. To be sure, the inherent tension between revolution and reformism cannot be erased by the fiat of our own desires; nor is it unlikely that the former will, at some stages, spill over whatever dams we may con-

struct. But a prior limitation of goals, founded on a clear conception of alternative consequences, together with the steeping of our movement in a spiritual atmosphere in which only democracy can live, can assure the preservation of its institutionally gradualist character.

I repeat: we choose inevitably between polar trends and this choice defines the framework and direction of our politics. Yet the very recognition of the necessity which binds us to the existing political alternatives frees us for the more intelligent construction of a special program which will take into account an attempt to correct some of the cardinal weaknesses of the trend to which we are committed. We are still *proposing* for history to *dispose*, but insofar as we as individuals and small groups can influence the course of events, our special program, operating within the general trend, can be effective.

Needed Revisions

The fruitful consequences of a dispraise of over-optimism are evident in the revisions we may make in the traditional social-democratic program. It is helpful to view the reformist's errors as largely stemming from an overly naive conception of the pliability of his environment. Failing to comprehend the weakness of men and institutions, he is blind to the necessity of taking that weakness into account and of shaping a program which will restrain the inevitable enfeebling dissipation of energy and intelligence. The revisions offered in the light of this perception are basically two:

I. *The practical socialist overturn must be complete within its limited sphere.* Over-optimistic gradualism has not understood the bearing of concentrated and interdependent industrialism on socialist strategy. Gradualism collapses as an effective program when we face the coordinated, integrated structure of our mass-production economy. There the strokes must be bold and thoroughgoing, permitting a speedy reorientation of that key sector of our economy along welfare lines. The failure to recognize this urgent necessity, or to prepare for that kind of action, was a fatal weakness of the social democratic governments in Europe. Firm and decisive measures, taken against the small number of ruling families and their satellites who staff the boards of directors of the hundred-odd apex corporations, need not undermine the institutionally gradualist approach. On the contrary: this politically and economically momentous but culturally insignificant stumbling-block must be energetically set aside in order to permit reformism to operate as an advance guard and in broader fields. This is the limited, but vital, sense in which socialism must be a revolutionary movement. Not to turn the social fabric inside out, but to recognize that a slow pace in changing man's behavior and status does not require a weak and timid

approach to the challenge of power in the essentially impersonal institutions of monopolistic industry and finance. The threat to the best in our civilization comes from those who rule at those heights; it is therefore conservative in its best sense to organize for decisive measures within that sphere. The socialist overturn neither ventures nor desires to root out the multitude in small industry, trade and agriculture; our program does not envision the introduction from above of a New Order in social relationships; but we can insist that that power—and no more—which now rests in the hands of the self-perpetuating industrial empires should be swiftly transferred to the responsible representatives of democratic government.

I use "overturn" here in an obvious, rather literal sense, denoting the actual mobilization of social forces in action. This is a proximate tool, not an ultimate objective. As a tool, it must be used coldly, with detachment, free of illusions as to the concrete forms it must take or as to what can be accomplished. Such an attitude will enable us to delineate an economic program attuned to those necessities of administrative responsibility and centralized direction dictated by the integrated character of the industrial system. We shall not expect miracles of democratic procedure and structure from instrumentalities which provide their own answers and, very largely, make their own rules. Yet it is this very sobriety which will help us to discover those democratic channels, consistent with the urgencies of production, which can be built into the economic order for whose effective functioning we are responsible. These statements would be counsels of despair were it not for our assumption of the restricted relevance for society as a whole of the revolutionary elements in our program, an outlook incomprehensible to those for whom Revolution is their sacred, all-embracing method. It is partly as a hangover from the consecrated approach to the revolutionary method that many socialists still insist upon a romantic view of its nature and its possible results. At the same time, forced to discard old blinkers, the uneasiness of ambiguity has led them to leave their program in the limbo of unconcretized proposals.

II. *Socialism must adopt the moral absolute of pacifism.* If social-democracy was naive about the method required for the transfer of control over the industrial apparatus, it was equally sanguine about the ability of men to choose consistently the method which embodied their own values. The pacifist absolute is such in respect to its function, operating as a hard rule for those groups which have testified to its truth. But the judgment and conclusion which it represents are empirical insights. It is a perception which provides a political reflex of our deepest moral values and is therefore a steadying factor in political choice. Events have taught us that we

are unable to permit ourselves complete freedom in the continuous recreation of political decisions. We are too deeply involved in immediate relationships, too sharply influenced by proximate consequences to be able to maintain the integrity of our ultimate aims unaided by functional absolutes. Hence the need for an act of collective faith in the enduring viability of procedures which we accept as crucial to the character of our movement. Democracy is one of these functional absolutes; pacifism must be another. The unity of democracy and pacifism as an interdependent set of means and objectives becomes more plainly manifest as each new development in the modern world unfolds. These tenets are more than tools: where they operate they are constituent fundamentals of the movement, referable only to the moral sources of its being. Originating in and justified by a prophetic empirical insight, they come to transcend their beginnings, to be woven into the symbolic, expressive image of our aspirations. In this way we return to an old and proven method of taking into account dependable human failings. *This* revolution, which has to do with the character of men and movements rather than with the practical mobilization of forces, is in its nature sacred, and completely consistent with the gradualist spirit it shares.

This cursory review of pressing revisions in the traditional social-democratic program, while radical, does not divorce us from the main stream of that polar trend. We should work as political missionaries, from within, sharing inevitably what is culpable and what is undefiled in the movement as a whole. Because we have a history, we cannot offer a "spotless banner." But the clear perception of where we must take our stand, the sober appraisal of what we have to deal with and what can be done, will help to deliver us from the pseudo-arena where "vacant shuttles weave the wind."

PHILIP SELZNICK

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REPORT ON MICHIGAN COMMONWEALTH

The Michigan Commonwealth Federation is the natural outgrowth of the recent political experiences of militant unionists in the state. It was founded when a large number of CIO secondary leaders, some AFL officials, and some farmers and professional people concluded that there was no time to be lost in establishing a political party that would really represent and fight for the interests of the mass of the people.

For some time previous there had been a diffuse feeling among Michigan unionists that "eventually" an independent party would be necessary. Always, however, the immediate situation seemed to contain some factor that made inadvisable the launching of the party "now." The articulation of this attitude was in some measure the result of the Detroit "Vote Labor" campaign of 1937 which piled up a huge vote for mayor and a councilmanic slate. Although the labor slate was defeated, it received a larger vote than many hitherto to winning slates and inspired an immense amount of work and enthusiasm. The anti-labor elements barely managed to squeeze their ticket through. Of this slate, incidentally, the mayor and three councilmen are now in the penitentiary.

The mounting interest in an independent party can also be ascribed to the long term educational work done by the Socialists and Communists in the Michigan labor movement. While the Communists now abhor the very thought of a new party, they at one time organized a phoney Farmer-Labor Party in the state and doubtless convinced many unionists of the soundness of the idea. The Socialists have consistently advocated independent political action.

However much these long term factors prepared the ground for the launching of a new party, the actual immediate cause for the formation of the MCF was the unhappy experience that CIO unions have had in the past few years with old-line politicians and the Democratic Party. After the "Vote Labor" campaign of 1937, the newly-expanded UAW-CIO invaded big-time politics. The 1938 state election was its first major venture, at which time it backed Democratic Governor Frank Murphy in return for his active support of the sit-down strikes. The leader of the Democratic state machine, Murray D. Van Wagoner, who harbored political ambitions of his own, sabotaged the Murphy campaign. With only the CIO working for him, Murphy was defeated.

In 1940, Van Wagoner was the Democratic candidate for governor. The CIO, directed by its support of FDR, also threw its weight behind Van Wagoner, who was elected and proceeded to win

the hostility of the CIO by using the state police to break a strike of pottery workers in Mt. Clemens. Since the union involved was a CIO federal union, the state office of the CIO handled the strike and made it the *cause célèbre* of an otherwise very uneventful year. Van Wagoner's attitude earned him the assurance that the CIO would oppose him for re-election in 1942.

In the pre-election dickering early in 1942, it became evident that the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Harry Kelly, was eager to negotiate a deal with the CIO. Suddenly and arbitrarily the international executive board of the UAW-CIO intervened. Prodded by Democratic politician Richard Frankenstein, the board overstepped the customary bounds of courtesy and invaded the field of the state CIO office. It endorsed Van Wagoner for re-election, thus obliging the State CIO to tag along. Trying to pull what it could out of the fire, the state CIO sent a large number of delegates to the 1942 state convention of the Democratic Party, where the delegates, meeting in caucus, sent emissaries to the party bosses. After long and arduous bargaining the 750,000 CIO members were rewarded for their support by the promise of, of all things, an assistant attorney-general!

At the same time, the CIO decided to use its considerable influence inside Detroit to remove Congressman Rudolph Tenerowicz who had taken a very anti-Negro stand in the Sojourner Truth case. It succeeded in beating him in the primaries and elected George Sadowski (whom a few years before it had beaten with Tenerowicz!) During the early part of his term Sadowski behaved exactly as do all Detroit Democratic Congressmen. His voting record was good, but he could hardly be called a flaming representative of the interests and opinions of the unionists of his district. It was not until the summer of 1943 that he incurred the antagonism of the CIO by a scandalous speech repudiating the whole notion of federal housing, a pet project of CIO leaders.

Sadowski's speech, the memory of the past raw deals dealt out by the Democratic Party, the request for endorsement by the CIO of a crew of old-fashioned and unprincipled county politicians, all combined to break the camel's back in the late spring and early summer of 1943.

The CIO political action agency in Detroit at this time was Wayne County's Labor's Non-Partisan League. Union leaders, headed by Emil Mazey, vigorous president of Briggs local 212 of the UAW-CIO, threatened to lead their unions out of the League unless work was begun on the building of a new political party. Since the

Communist controlled unions had already withdrawn, and the League's influence was on the wane, it could not afford to lose any more of its member locals, and after a few feeble efforts at resistance, the leaders of the LNPL agreed to the demand for a new party, though it was apparent that their tongues were in their cheeks.

In June 1943, the annual convention of the LNPL voted that the state CIO convention start explorations toward the formation of a new party. The League changed its name to Progressive Labor League and adopted as its major function the promotion of a new party, actions approved by a huge majority of the delegates, with only 15 out of 200 voting against it. The delegates spoke firmly and intelligently of the need for a new party. They resisted behind-the-scenes pressure of the national CIO office to head them off and their resolutions committee, meeting with high national CIO officials, insisted that it would no longer accept the explanation that FDR is well-intentioned but misled by evil advisors.

The following state CIO convention was very evenly divided on the question of a new party, its advocates constituting a majority of the convention political action committee. Committee chairman Paul Silver, president of UAW-CIO local 351, brought in a resolution instructing the incoming state executive board to initiate negotiations with other labor and farmer organizations and progressive groups. It was impossible to judge the results of a voice or standing vote in a crowd of 1800 delegates, but the chairman declared that the resolution had been defeated.

That night the administration caucus, supporters of regional director August Scholle, was in a furor, the defenders of the resolution threatening to bolt the caucus unless Scholle and his candidate for state CIO president, John Gibson, helped put it across. This threat of revolt told on the administration leaders, for they felt they needed every single vote to defeat the Addes-Communist slate. Finally, a compromise was patched up providing for an educational campaign by the state CIO on the need for a new party and ordering the incoming executive board to establish a committee to investigate the possibility of support by other groups. A final decision was to be left to a referendum vote of the state CIO membership.

Scholle took the floor personally to speak for this compromise. After several standing votes had yielded no conclusive result, it was agreed that the matter should be placed on the ballot along with the election of officers. The vote went, by a very narrow margin, in favor of the resolution.

The state CIO executive board never carried out the instructions of the convention. It did not conduct a campaign of education, and its committee did not approach any other organization. No vote of

the membership was ever taken. Instead the committee hired a public opinion expert to survey the probable public reaction to a new party. The results of the survey were never disclosed, but they are understood to have been very favorable. At last the state executive board frankly decided that it must drop the whole matter because it conflicted with national CIO policy.

The proponents of a new party were not through fighting, however. After the state CIO's conference to discuss political action of the old Gompers stripe, late in 1943, the new party advocates held a conference in Lansing, at which they launched a committee to promote a new party. This move was headed by Mazey and Silver, and attracted a large and enthusiastic following among CIO secondary leaders, AFLers, professional people, and some farmers. Immediately following the formation of the committee, the United Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Employees of the CIO, headed by Tucker Smith, was host for a week to Ted Jolliffe, provincial leader of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation group in the Ontario legislature. Jolliffe spoke to numerous union meetings during his visit and helped consolidate the feeling in favor of a new party.

FOUNDING CONFERENCE

A conference in March 1944, called to discuss the problems of new party organization, was attended by 350 delegates, most of them from important local unions. It was addressed by David Lewis, national secretary of the Canadian CCF, whose party's phenomenal success in the Ontario elections was an impetus to Michigan progressives. A decision was made to launch a new party named the "Michigan Commonwealth Federation." The conference authorized the original committee to continue in office and to arrange for a constitutional and nominating convention late in July. It also adopted a statement of basic principles calling for industrial democracy, and ruled that the new party would take no part in the presidential campaign. Candidates were to be run in selected areas, and membership in the MCF was deemed incompatible with membership in any rival party. The immediate organization of Commonwealth clubs—to be the membership base of the party—was planned.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the new party was composed almost entirely of over-burdened union officials, and while from state chairman Matthew Hammond, president of the huge West Side Tool and Die local 157 of the UAW-CIO, on down through all the officers, there was the greatest amount of good will and fine intentions, the time was lacking. Much of the work was thrown on to

Tucker Smith who seemed to have a great talent for formulating the necessary documents. Consequently the petition gathering went slowly, but a spurt in the last week enabled the necessary signatures to be filed before the deadline.

The plan then called for immediate efforts to organize clubs and secure affiliations in order to build up the convention. Unfortunately, again, the preoccupation of the leaders with their own pressing union affairs slowed this process down. Finally, an office manager was secured, and several organizers were accredited on the understanding that they would pay their own way by the proceeds of their organizing work.

CONVENTION PERSPECTIVE

This is written just about two weeks before the convention of the MCF is to be held. It is unlikely that the convention will be as large as was the study conference in March. Its delegates will come, in greatest measure, from the Commonwealth Clubs, since relatively few unions have affiliated directly. Representation at the convention will be on the basis of one delegate for every ten club members, whereas unions will be represented by one delegate for every forty dues-paying members. Union representatives will be limited to 45% of the voting strength in the convention, although it is very unlikely that this rule will have to be invoked, and union delegates must sign a pledge equivalent to joining the party, and renouncing connection with any rival party.

It is considered likely that the convention will nominate a ticket for state administrative officers, from governor down, and congressional and legislative candidates in those districts where a good campaign can be made. A prominent progressive farm leader is expected to accept the gubernatorial nomination. Most realistic observers expect that the vote for the MFC candidates will be low. This will be due to the insufficient publicity it has received, the inexperience of the party workers, and the fact that the best possible organizational job has not been done. It is hoped that the CIO will agree to support MCF candidates in places where no CIO-endorsed person won in the primaries. Such support would ensure a better showing.

The program will be put in final form at the convention, but as formulated at the March Study Conference, it flatly urged a "democratically planned economy in which the material resources and principal means of production are owned and operated by and for the people," and opposed "all dictatorial and totalitarian forces threatening democracy." The response to this formulation of the essentials of democratic socialism will give some idea as to the

acceptability of such a program to American voters. Important, also, will be the reaction to the "Commonwealth" name instead of the traditional "Farmer-Labor" slogan: "Commonwealth" intended to indicate a broader base than "Farmer-Labor," possibly more congenial to American voters than the narrow class appeal.

Since the MCF is still at the stage where its future is uncertain, predictions are risky. Given half a chance, however, it has great potentialities. Not the least of these will be the honour of inspiring similar developments in other states, and the formation in the not too distant future of a national federation of people's parties to force a realignment of American politics.

JUDAH DROB

[The last week-end in July, the MCF held its first constitutional and nominating convention in the Olds Hotel in Lansing. The convention adopted what the newspapers described as a "Socialist program" whose central feature is the demand for a planned and "democratized" economy. It was attended by more than 100 delegates and nominated several candidates for Congressional and Legislative office. The largest proportion of delegates were CIO members, a somewhat smaller number were AFL members. The State Farmers Union was represented by its president and several important leaders. FU president Simeon Marton made one of the major addresses at the convention, was elected a vice-chairman of the MCF, and was nominated for state senator from his district. Also in the delegate body were some professional men and a few small business men.

The new party decisively rejected an effort to make it a "Labor Party" in name, or by establishing the practice of union bloc affiliation. It set as an ultimate goal, not yet to be enforced, the exclusion of members of other political parties and organizations. It is understood that members of the Socialist Party, of the CIO-PAC and of several "splinter" groups which are now in the MCF will eventually have to choose between the MCF and their present organization, or have the organization to which they now belong bow itself completely out of "political" activity.

The major electoral campaign of the MFC will be in the 17th Congressional District, where its candidate is state chairman Matthew Hammond, president of the powerful West Side Tool and Die Local 157 of the UAW-CIO. The 17th district includes a corner of Detroit, the strongly industrial city of Pontiac, and several other large concentrations of industrial workers. It is expected that the CIO-PAC will endorse Hammond.

J. D.]